

## don't go where we can't follow by janie\_tangerine

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**Summary:**

in which Jonathan and Nancy stage a rescue mission when Steve goes missing and realize a few things while on it.

## don't go where we can't follow

### Author's Note:

Soo, I was taking halloween-related prompts on tumblr. I got asked for *the OT3, post season 2 and Jonathan and Nancy save Steve (maybe that's how they realize they care for Steve) from some creepy creature*, and given that I've wanted an excuse to put the ot3 together since I finished watching S2 WHY THE HELL NOT. It's what it says on the tin except that it probably isn't scary and it shows I have zero imagination when it comes to making monsters up, but hey, the kids would have appreciated. Probably.

That said, the characters belong to the rightful owners, the title is from LOTR (relevant to some of my choices here /o\ ) and I shall saunter back downwards now while I hope next season does the OT3 some more justice. /o\

*Three months*, Jonathan thinks. *Three damned months*.

At least before the last round they had a year of relative quiet, and El hadn't closed the gate yet, so there was some kind of explanation.

Now –

Now he hopes that *something* didn't get called back to the Upside Down when she closed it and that this a one-off thing, he *really* does, because he doesn't know if he has it in him to go through another round of monster hunting, but that's not what he's worried about right now.

Right now –

“Steve!” He calls out for the umpteenth time in the last half hour.

No answer. Same as before.

*Shit, shit, shit.*

He grabs his brother's walkie and presses the button that should connect him to Mike's, which is currently in Nancy's hands.

"Nance? Anything?"

"No," she replied, sounding wrecked.

"Fuck. Okay, change of plans. The parking lot is clear, yes?"

"Yes. He's definitely not here."

*Fuck.*

"We gotta go to the base. I'll meet you at the gate," he says.

*Fuck.*

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Thing is: Jonathan might've gone looking for Steve after the snow ball, when he came back to pick Dustin up. They hadn't talked for a month, and he had felt like *utter shit* whenever he thought about the situation, because after Will got his bearings back and he could focus on things that weren't his brother's well-being and Nancy, he *had* noticed that Steve didn't seem to hang out with his old pals anymore, or with *anyone* – most people seem to have moved onto that Hargrove asshole, who on his side *does* steer clear from Steve. Jonathan got Lucas to share what exactly happened and he's honestly glad Hargrove got the memo, because like *hell* he wants *him* around his brother and his friends anyways, but still –

He felt like shit about it, honestly, especially because it's not as if he and Steve *talked* about it. And it's not like he stole the man's girlfriend or *whatever* because he didn't do anything aimed at it and he hadn't even thought Nancy might ever want him back until Bauman pointed it out, but still, it's obvious that Steve is still carrying a torch and Jonathan knows how that feels even too well.

Never mind that *somehow* after his first stint apparently Steve decided that hanging out with the kids wasn't such a hardship and so he's been around the house a few times – shit, now he plays D&D with them, can you believe that – and it had been awkward, and –

Jonathan went looking for him.

“Shouldn’t you and Nance...” Steve had started, obviously not quite knowing how to finish that sentence.

“We’re volunteering. And she’s dancing with your protégé, for that matter.”

“Wait, *with Dustin?*”

“Yeah. I think every other guy in the room is being envious as hell. Anyway – listen, I just – I don’t even know how to say it or *what* I should say, but –”

“Jonathan, I *already* told Nance that it was okay. I know. And I know you didn’t exactly do anything to come in between the two of us. It didn’t work out.”

“Fine, but I know it sucks, and just – I’m sorry that it does. And since you’ve been around and I have a feeling you will for a while, I don’t want things to be *weird*, okay?”

Steve had *looked* at him. “As in?”

“I don’t even know. But I don’t want to purposefully avoid you or shit like that, if you’re willing to do the same. Fuck, I’m terrible at this.”

“Byers, if you said you wanted us to be *friendly* if not friends you could’ve said from the beginning,” Steve had snorted, and Jonathan had laughed back because suddenly it wasn’t so *awkward* anymore.

So he did stop purposefully avoiding Steve whenever he dropped Will home or was around. Steve had sometimes left the kids to their own shit and come to his room so he could talk with someone who wasn’t fucking thirteen. They were *friendly*.

Nancy had been happy about it – actually, Jonathan has a feeling she also felt shitty for how the whole thing had resolved itself, and that was why she was glad that at least the two of them were on speaking terms.

Hell, Jonathan had thought, *maybe* one of these days they *might* do

something together just to see if they got over the awkward phase.

*He had thought.*

Then two hours ago Will had barged into his room yelling that *they had a code red on their hands.*

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Or: apparently Steve had been bringing them all back from the arcade, bar Will, because Will wasn't feeling that great and had decided to stay in, and *something* happened in the damned woods, Jonathan hadn't quite grasped what, but the gist was that some other Upside Down monster almost drove them off the road and it was a good thing that Steve kept the bat in the trunk always these days because he fought the thing off the rear window of his car, except that then Steve said he was going to check around in case *something else* was around and he *didn't come back.*

*Or something.*

Anyway, Max drove to Dustin's house where Dustin called Will who got Jonathan, and then they warned Nancy as well – Jonathan picked her up quickly, she insisted to come, they got the kids to tell them where the hell the entire thing went down, and Jonathan has no clue of where they are now but he has a feeling they're calling Hopper so he can send his daughter to help out, which would probably be great given that Jonathan has checked the entire darned wood and found nothing, same as Nancy in the parking lot.

*Shit*, Jonathan thinks, again, and then heads for the base.

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Nancy's waiting for him already – she looks worried as hell, same as he feels, truth to be told.

"Nothing at all?" She asks him.

"Zero," he confirms. "I imagine that there's no trace of –"

"The opening in the parking lot? No," Nancy says, "none at all."

They look at the base. In theory it should be deserted, the military *and* the rest of the crowd left a long time ago and everything should be shut down, but –

“*Fuck*,” Jonathan says, hurrying towards the gate. It’s *open*.

“Should it be?” Nancy asks, her hands tightening around her rifle. Jonathan has no idea how her parents don’t know she kept it, but he won’t ask.

“No,” he says, “in theory they locked everything. Let’s take a look.”

He looks down at the ground. There *are* traces of something slimy leading towards the main building.

“Well,” he says, “whatever the hell this is, it’s definitely there. Maybe it knew it was where they opened the gate the first time?”

“Maybe,” Nancy agrees. “That’s weird though. I mean, have you ever seen one of those demi – no, dema –”

“Demogorgons,” Jonathan supplies as they move forward.

“Right. Demogorgons. Have you ever seen any *not* killing whatever they caught at once?”

“No,” Jonathan agrees, “but then again, have you seen blood around here or in the parking lot or anywhere near the place where they stopped?”

“That’s true,” Nancy says. “Well, we’ll find out soon. *Fuck*, I hope he’s all right.”

“Me, too,” Jonathan agrees at once, because *shit*, after the year Steve’s just had he can’t fucking *die* now, especially not when Jonathan is sure they were sort of becoming friends and when he was working on college applications or so Jonathan imagined from seeing him hunched over assignments in the library, not when Dustin has already planned his graduation party and everyone but Steve knows that –

*Fuck*.

Never mind that the last time he asked Steve if his parents didn't mind him being out of the house that much or doing his homework at Dustin's or wherever Steve had just shrugged and said they really didn't notice.

Sometimes Jonathan thinks of how ironic it is in the great scheme of things that *his* mom is about the only one in between her, Steve's and Nancy's who'd actually notice he's gone, but it's not the time to go there.

They reach the entrance.

It's open.

There's a *lot* more slime on the ground, and actually –

"Wait," Jonathan says, reaching out towards something *white* that was sticking to the wall.

"The hell?"

"What's that?"

"Spider's web," he says, throwing it back on the ground. "Don't touch it, it's fucking disgusting. Well, I guess *something* is definitely around."

Good thing *she* has the gun because *he* fucking has nothing on his hands, damn –

*Shit.* That'd be Steve's baseball bat in the corner of the room, isn't it?

"Wait, I'm gonna get that. If anything, he'll want it back."

"If he's alive," Nancy says, sounding pained.

"Come on, there isn't a drop of blood around. Shouldn't there be?"

"That's – that's a point. All right. Let's follow the slime, I guess."

They do, as silently as they can – the emergency lights were on just in the entrance, so now they're pretty much without light that's not

coming in from the windows. Too bad that the slime leads *downstairs*.

“Well, *shit*,” Nancy says.

“Wait, I’ve got a lighter,” Jonathan says. He always has one with *just in case*, especially after he learned *how* Steve and the kids fought off those monsters in the Upside Down the last time. He pushes the button – there’s slime all over the stairs.

They walk down, slow, because if one of them breaks their neck they’re done, and then they hear some *seriously* disturbing sound coming from the hallway on their left the moment they reach the first floor underground.

“What is that even?” Nancy whispers.

“No clue,” Jonathan replies. It’s like a hiss, but – not quite? Shit, he has no fucking idea. He grasps the bat tighter and they head for the hallway. He can’t see much in the darkness with just that one small light bar where he’s putting his feet, but the noise definitely comes from the last room on the left.

He cautiously moves behind the door and raises the lighter.

And –

“Is that fucking *Shelob*,” he hisses, at the same time as Nancy says, “*What is that thing*.”

“*Shelob*?” Nancy whispers.

“Hugeass spider. *Lord of the Rings*. Captures people to keep them as a food reserve,” Jonathan hisses back, looking at the disgusting, slimy gray spider that’s about as tall as he and Nancy put together and which is definitely wrapping *something* into a cocoon of white, equally slimy web.

“Sounds about right,” Nancy replies. “You think he’s –”

“Inside... the thing? Yeah. Has to be. Also, at least it’s just *one* fucking spider.”



Imagine if it had been *more*.

Jonathan doesn't even let himself consider the option.

At least, it doesn't seem like *Shelob* here has very good hearing, nor smell, because it hasn't heard them for now.

"Right," Nancy says, "I think – one of us distracts it and the other goes for the cocoon?"

"One of us *kills* it. I doubt he's going to be able to move if he's inside that thing."

"I can shoot it, but if it's anywhere like –"

"No, you've gotta set that on fire. I mean, it's *slimy*. If it doesn't work, I guess you can shoot it and I can take it from the back."

"Good enough. You think you can use that to rip the web?"

"I should hope. It has *nails*. Okay, now you grab that lighter and just – I'll get inside first."

"Okay. Okay, *go*."

He holds on to the bat – shit, he *had* made it himself but honest, he'd be more than glad to give it back to Steve if he had the chance now, and he walks inside the room, sticking to the left side of the wall, not seeing shit but *hearing* that thing as it spits out more web and honestly, it's fucking disgusting and he can feel slime on the ground. He wants to throw up, but he can't do that now, can he, and then he sees *light* coming from the other side of the room and his lighter flying towards the spider's back.

It stops.

Nothing happens for a moment, and he braces himself for trying to bash the thing's head without even fucking seeing it, but then it makes a *noise* and –

And it catches fire, *good*, and while it does it finally lights the other side of the room and yes, Steve's inside the web, and he's still

breathing even if he looks way too pale, but as long as he's alive, who cares. The spider moves back with a screech and Jonathan can see Nancy moving back from the door – he catches his chance and uses the bat to tear apart the web holding Steve on the side.

Thankfully, it's fresh and still slimy, which means that it doesn't make any resistance and that Steve about falls over him, but Jonathan was ready for it – he catches him and pulls one of Steve's arms over his shoulder before turning back towards the door. The enormous spider is still stumbling towards it, *still* a ball of fire, and he doesn't dare walk any forward because he doesn't want to accidentally set *them* both on fire, and at least he can feel Steve breathing next to him even if he's fucking freezing and his pulse is definitely slower than it should be. Then again if he's passed out because *Shelob* over there paralyzed him somehow it's normal, he figures, and he only dares move when the spider definitely hobbles out of the room with a wail that he'll be glad to *never* hear again in his life.

Well, good riddance.

"Nancy?" He calls out.

"I'm outside! Is he –"

"Cold and not currently awake, but he's all right. Can I come out?"

"Yeah, all clear. I think it was the only one left."

"Good," Jonathan breathes out, and runs towards the door. He considers his option, then he hands Nancy the bat and pulls Steve's arms around his shoulders, grabbing him under his legs.

"It's going to be faster and I can't drag him up the stairs like that," Jonathan explains. "Come on, let's go before that thing sets everything on fire. Not that it wouldn't make me feel bad."

"Please, they should demolish this damned place and pour salt on the ruins," Nancy agrees, and they hurry back up the stairs and outside the base, and for some miracle neither of them steps on any of the slime. When they're finally out and breathing fresh air, he's feeling

like fainting.

He takes the walkie-talkie from his jacket instead.

“Dustin?” He asks.

“Jonathan!”

Wow, they *were waiting*.

“Found him,” he says. “He’s all right. We’re bringing him over as soon as we get to the car.”

“Oh, *good*, you’re the best! Wait, what got him?”

“Ask him how it feels to be in Shelob’s lair next time,” Jonathan huffs. “We’re going now, see you all later.”

Except that Steve *really* feels like a block of ice.

“Damn,” he says, “he’s too cold. How far is the car?”

“Not *that* much. I can get it while you wait?”

“No,” he says immediately. “No one is going alone in the woods. I can carry him,” he assures her.

They start walking. None of them speaks for a while. Steve’s breathing against Jonathan’s neck and he’s still fucking *cold*.

“Before –” Jonathan starts. “Before, uh. I was – I was worried sick,” he admits into the silence of the woods.

“I was, too,” Nancy replies, her voice barely audible, her hand going to Steve’s elbow. “Wow, he *is* freezing.”

“I know. We should get him warmer before driving off. That said – I just – I was thinking, if he actually – I mean, if we had found him dead –”

Nancy shudders, her hand going to her mouth. “No,” she says. “Don’t. I just – don’t.”

Jonathan can't keep a smile from his lips. "You miss him, don't you?"

Nancy shoots him a look that's – not *guilty*, exactly, but –

"How – how weird it is," she says, quietly, "that when we were together I couldn't stop thinking about *you* and now sometimes I just – I'm happy, I swear I am, but I *miss* him?"

"Given that I've felt like *something* wasn't quite right for all this time, not that much."

They look at each other. Jonathan knows what she's thinking. Nancy most probably knows what *he's* thinking, except that neither of them is saying it. But –

"Are we thinking the same thing?" He asks as they finally approach the car.

She smiles tentatively. "Are you thinking that it doesn't ever quite work because if it's just two of us it... just doesn't?"

"I might have," he admits. Maybe yesterday he wouldn't have. Now, though –

*Now* –

Now he thinks it's about right.

Maybe they should have realized it long ago, *maybe*, but for now he just opens the car and gets Steve on the backseat, then finds a couple of blankets in the trunk and brings them over.

"Get on his side," he tells Nancy. "I'm getting on the other. I mean, we've got to get him warm or not?"

"I like how you think," she smiles, relieved, and does what he asked for. Jonathan slams the door closed and moves on to Steve's free side – Nancy has both arms around his waist. He thinks about the logistics for a moment, then he covers Nancy's outer arm with his, puts the other around Steve's shoulders and uses it to keep the blankets in their place.

Steve *does* warm up soon enough, and of course he was cold since if he had a jacket he lost it through whatever it is that happened, and at some point he groans a little before blinking his eyes open, and –

He closes them again.

Then opens them, for the second time.

“Am I dead?” He rasps a moment later.

“Nice to see you’re still an idiot,” Nancy huffs. “No, but you got close to it. You managed to get yourself captured by the only stray monster from the Upside Down still around and we had to free you from – what’s that thing’s name again?”

“Shelob,” Jonathan grins, waiting for –

“Wait. Don’t tell me. Lord of the Rings. Giant spider. Right?”

“Yeah. Shows you’ve been hanging around those nerds,” Jonathan laughs. “That’s also why you’re slimy as hell, and we all are, but never mind that.”

“To be honest, I’m glad I don’t remember *that*,” Steve shudders. “But uh, wait, how –”

Jonathan takes pity on him. “You disappeared on the kids, they got to Dustin’s, they called me and her, we went off looking for you. They’re also waiting for us to go back, but since you were a block of ice we figured we’d warm you up before driving off.”

“Oh.” Does Steve sound *disappointed*? A tiny bit? “I’m warm now. Really. You don’t have to –”

“Steve,” Nancy interrupts him, “how about, we *want* to?”

“You – you *what*?”

“Jonathan, *you* tell him.”

“Wait, why *me*?”

“You figured it out better.”

“I didn’t – oh, whatever. Harrington, listen, *something* wasn’t working.”

“What –”

“Let me finish. Nancy confirmed me that somehow, whoever out of the two of us she’s with, it *somehow* feels like something’s missing. *I* was feeling like that, too, on top of – never mind that. I also realized that I *really* didn’t want you to die on me just before we were planning to ask you along next time we went to catch a movie. Everything is suggesting that maybe we should just, uh, expand our horizons.”

“Guys, wait, are you seriously saying that we should *all* date each other while we’re covered in slime that a fucking *spider from the Upside Down* left on me and I don’t even remember your heroic rescue?”

“That’s exactly what we’re saying,” Nancy replies. “If you’re good with trying, of course.”

Steve looks at her, then at him, and thing is – when he looks at Nancy it’s as if he can’t believe what she’s just said, and when he looks at Jonathan there’s something slightly soft in his stare, as if *he likes what he’s seeing* but would have never acted on it, and for a moment Jonathan thinks, *are we going to kiss*, and then –

“We all stink,” Nancy declares, and yeah, they do, and Jonathan’s car is going to smell for *months*.

“Guess I should drive,” he says, “but you two can stay here.”

“I don’t need –” Steve starts.

“Man, shut up already. By the way, was *asking if you died and went to Heaven* a yes?”

“What –”

“Because after we shower, I’m amenable to do that again. Just on a

real bed,” he adds, wondering *where the hell did that come from* because a year ago he’d have never found it in himself to say such a thing, and then he squeezes Steve’s hand before he can think too much about it and moves over to the driver’s seat.

He looks at Nancy cuddling up to Steve under the blanket in the rearview mirror.

Strangely (or not?), he doesn’t feel jealous.

Not at all.

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He takes a shower while the kids swarm over to Steve’s side and make sure he’s actually not about to die or anything – he doesn’t know how they all managed to get to *his* place, possibly with bikes, but by the time he’s out and he leaves it to Nancy they are *still* hovering around Steve and honestly, it’s heartwarming, so he’ll let them. Lucas informs him that Hopper actually did drive El here, which is why she’s in his living room, too, and then decided to let her sleep over since they did come all this way.

Fair, Jonathan figures, and goes to get some clothes ready. When Steve finally is out of the shower and knocks tentatively on his door, Jonathan’s mouth goes dry as takes in the sight of Steve wearing *his* clothes – he looks like he’s swimming in them, even if they’re the same height and Steve’s certainly not lacking muscle, but Jonathan does have larger shoulders, and he doesn’t wear *tight* stuff in the first place.

Nancy’s already on the bed, she had some clothes around the place already.

“Well,” Steve says, “guess we don’t stink now?”

“No,” Nancy agrees, standing up. “And you still didn’t reply to his question. Then again, you aren’t sleeping on the couch with the kids, so –”

“What if it was a yes?” Steve cuts her off, not quite looking at either of them but Jonathan can recognize the body language. It’d have

been his own a year ago.

He smiles.

“Then the bed’s over there,” he whispers, relieved, and he thinks that he kind of wants to take a picture of Steve’s face right now, because he has slightly parted lips, in surprise, and his hair’s sticking in ways that it usually never does, and it’s still damp from the shower and Jonathan kind of wants to run his fingers through it except that Nancy’s doing it instead –

Fuck that.

The camera’s just on his right – he takes it, snaps a picture, then two, then three, and then they all end up on the bed where they push Steve in the middle, he’s not cold anymore but Jonathan *did* say he was amenable to do it, didn’t he?

He sees Nancy smiling at him from over Steve’s head as he moves closer, their fingers meeting as they rearrange themselves, and he decides that he likes how this new arrangement’s starting.

Now if it means that they’re *done* with monster hunting, too, that’d be grand.

End.